United Nations A/C.3/52/SR.12

General Assembly
Fifty-second session

Official Records

Distr.: General
11 February 1998
English
Original: French

Third Committee

Summary record of the 12th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 23 October 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

Contents

Agenda item 105: Advancement of women (*continued*)*

Agenda item 106: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*)*

* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

97-82235 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 105: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/38/Rev.1, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/300, 326, 337, 352, 355, 356, 408, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

Agenda item 106: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/52/113-E/1997/18, A/52/281, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

1. **Mrs. Mahouve** (Cameroon) said that there was a need, in the context of the advancement of women, to take a particular interest in rural women, since very often they were marginalized or even excluded. In Africa, rural women played a key role in development – and, thus, in social and economic progress – and yet they were still among the poorest and most vulnerable in society, with the least access to financial resources and markets. That situation was explained by such internal factors as laws and regulations unfavourable to the advancement of women, outdated cultural perceptions and the breakdown of family structures, and by external factors, particularly the chronic economic crisis resulting from the decline of the exchange rate, the external debt burden, political instability and the international climate.

2. She called once again upon States to implement without delay the recommendations of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and welcomed in that regard the leading role played by the United Nations, which had designated the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) as the "spearhead" in the advancement of women; her delegation also noted with satisfaction the role played by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), other United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations.

3. Violence against women was another obstacle to their advancement, and must be eradicated if the world were to call itself civilized. Her delegation fully supported the work of the United Nations to that end, and welcomed the creation of the Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women.

4. It was important to ensure the advancement of women within the United Nations system; her delegation therefore welcomed the progress made in that regard in the United Nations Secretariat and urged those responsible to ensure that the goal of 50/50 gender distribution was achieved.

5. Her Government, in the context of its follow-up to Beijing, had taken a number of measures aimed at improving the situation of rural women, measures which had included facilitating their access to microcredit and informing them of their basic rights.

6. **Mr. Al-Shamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, despite the consensus which had emerged at the major world conferences on women and other meetings devoted to the advancement of women, the programmes of action adopted at those forums had been implemented only in part, for many women, particularly in the developing and least developed States, were currently suffering as a result of exploitation, violence, poverty, disease, forced displacement and ignorance, and had no access to health care, education and other social services. His delegation wished therefore to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and to emphasize once again the need to redouble efforts to achieve equitable distribution of financial resources and to create thereby conditions conducive to the advancement of women.

7. The decline of aid from donor States to third world countries had a major impact on the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly women. The United Arab Emirates therefore appealed to the developed countries, donor States and specialized agencies responsible for development to review their policies on assistance and the programmes they had adopted with a view to supporting the efforts of States and regions to improve the situation of women and enhance their integration in society on the basis of the principles of equality and justice and with due regard for the specific characteristics of each society, particularly its traditions, customs and values.

8. His delegation commended the work of the United Nations, and in particular of UNIFEM, to promote the rights of women, protect them from violence, and develop their capabilities in the economic and social fields. It noted with satisfaction the positive outcomes of the Microcredit Summit held at Washington, D.C. in 1997, with the participation of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The granting of small loans to the poorest families would benefit, among others, deprived women living in rural areas and in regions devastated by natural disasters, occupation and wars, as well as civil and regional conflicts. His delegation wished to express in that connection its deep concern at the daily suffering of Palestinian Arab women and their families in the territories occupied by Israel. He appealed to the international community to bring pressure to bear upon the Israeli authorities to bring an immediate end to their policy of aggression and to take urgent measures to assist Palestinian women in exercising their right to self-determination and improving their living conditions, which had deteriorated

sharply under occupation. He recalled, in that regard, that one of the first measures taken by the United Arab Emirates had been the promulgation of a series of laws and regulations enshrining the constitutional rights of women (notably the right to work, the right to social security and civil rights). That body of legislation protected women from violence and conferred upon them legal capacity and the right to own goods and property, to manage their money, to exercise a profession and to take advantage of all forms of instruction and all health and social services, as well as granting them a number of privileges (maternity leave, parental leave, etc.). It also emphasized the need to accord women as great a role as possible in power structures and decision-making, in the public domain as well as in private life. The United Arab Emirates was to host in Abu Dhabi, from 23 to 25 November 1997, a conference of Arab women which would focus on defining a legal framework to enable women to participate more actively in decision-making.

9. At the international level, the United Arab Emirates had been one of the first countries to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to take practical steps to that end. In particular, his Government had adopted a national plan of action, which included plans to set up a high-level national commission to monitor progress with regard to the status of women, carry out surveys and research in the field to quantify progress, improve the scientific, technical and professional training of women, develop literacy schemes for women, set up more creches and kindergartens, raise women's awareness of health issues and improve health services, provide support to women's organizations, coordinate action by educational and religious institutions and information centres with a view to raising public awareness of women's issues and changing people's mentality and habits, and increase women's awareness of environmental problems.

10. **Mr. Wilmot** (Ghana) said that his delegation shared the view of a number of other delegations on the need for comprehensive, integrated and concerted action at the national, regional and international levels if the outcome of the Beijing Conference was to be translated into action and the position of women in society was to be significantly improved.

11. It was encouraging to note that several countries had taken practical measures to broaden women's participation and to mainstream gender perspectives into their policies and programmes. In Ghana, certain traditional practices which jeopardized women's health had been banned; the National Council on Women and Development had been instrumental in incorporating gender equality issues in the "Ghana Vision 20-20" programme and had finalized a comprehensive plan of action to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, with the backing of the Government. His Government had decided that its priority areas for action in 1997-1998 would be poverty reduction and access to microcredit, education and the girl child, and women's participation in decision-making and public life.

12. With regard to action at the regional level, he took note of the regional meeting organized by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, with the help of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). He hoped that the necessary resources would be provided to implement the proposals made at that meeting, and called for direct support for the member States of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. He also took note of the UNICEF umbrella programme entitled "African Women in Crisis", which was part of the strategy to empower women to play a greater part in the economic and social life of their country and which should, like the other programmes, be extended to other regions of the African continent.

13. He welcomed the various initiatives taken by UNIFEM with regard to integration and coordination, as well as those taken by other organizations of the United Nations system, particularly the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

14. Women were disadvantaged, but continued to play a major role in rural economies. In sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, they made up 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce responsible for food production, both for household consumption and sale, and that should be taken into account in strategies to help women. Governments bore the primary responsibility for making appropriate legal and administrative reforms, in collaboration with intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other actors from civil society, to promote gender equality with regard to access to productive resources, in accordance with the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/52/326). It was vital that the United Nations should provide technical training, through the intermediary of the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and INSTRAW, so that Governments could implement the programmes.

15. His delegation welcomed the conclusions agreed upon by the Economic and Social Council on gender mainstreaming and hoped that the annual review of action taken would help it to achieve the objectives it had set.

16. He then drew attention to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (A/CN.4/1997/47), which was also the subject of a report by the Secretary-General (A/52/356). It was regrettable that, despite efforts made by several Member States, few States had taken steps to end violence against women migrant workers. He therefore called on the United Nations system to pay special attention to that problem and invited the States concerned to adopt appropriate measures to end the exploitation of women and violence against women migrant workers. The Secretary-General noted in his report that as at 16 July 1997 only 17 countries had become parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families: all States which had not done so were therefore urged to sign and ratify or accede to the Convention.

17. After welcoming the action taken by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, he said that much remained to be done and that it was imperative that countries, actors in civil society and the international community as a whole should cooperate in fulfilling the objectives set at the Beijing Conference.

18. **Ms. Bennani** (Morocco) said that her delegation was disappointed to observe that the hopes raised by the Beijing Conference had not materialized. While it was true that discrimination against women had declined in many countries which had adopted the requisite legislative reform, women's liberation was still hindered by hostile prejudices and socio-economic constraints. In the labour market, women were often confined to subordinate jobs in which their qualifications were undervalued and their chances of promotion limited. In the areas of health and education, women and girls were disadvantaged, despite the considerable efforts of the developing countries. Lack of resources was often at the root of that situation, particularly in Africa, where official development assistance had been reduced by around 40 per cent.

19. Dealing with the serious difficulties that the women of developing countries faced as a result of economic constraints would require sustained and coordinated action by the international financial institutions. The latter should devote part of their development assistance to programmes to improve the status of women, particularly those in the most vulnerable social groups. The programme for United Nations reform proposed by the Secretary-General should serve to strengthen mechanisms for the advancement of women; the latter should also be provided with the human and material resources needed for their proper functioning.

20. Gender equality had become one of the fundamental principles of human rights, but participation by women in political life was essential for its realization. It was unfortunate that, although women made up more than half of the world population, there were so few of them in representative bodies. Morocco was pleased that the Commission on the Status of Women, of which it was a member, had organized a meeting on women's participation in political life.

21. The activities of INSTRAW and UNIFEM should be encouraged, particularly through the payment of substantial contributions.

22. **Ms. Rodrigues** (Mozambique) said that her delegation associated itself fully with the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by the representative of Zambia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Gender equality, which was guaranteed by the Constitution of Mozambique, was among her Government's priorities. Mozambique had developed a five-year national plan of action for the period 1995-1999 in order to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

23. Aware that women in Mozambique represented the largest and the most vulnerable group of the population, and that they played an important role in social and economic development, her Government had adopted measures in various areas (including education of women and girl children, combating discrimination against women, and access to health care and credit) and was devoting particular attention to women and children affected by armed conflicts.

24. The number of women in political and administrative decision-making positions was increasing, but their representation at the local level was still low. The Government was therefore encouraging them to take part in the local elections scheduled for early 1998. The success of national measures however depended on concerted efforts at the regional and international levels; Mozambique had therefore underwritten the gender strategy adopted by SADC.

25. Effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action required changes of attitudes and beliefs among men and women, political commitment by States and other actors, and the availability of human and financial resources, particularly in the least developed countries.

26. The United Nations, particularly the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Commission on the Status of Women, had a key role to play in providing advice and monitoring. She urged the United Nations, in the context of

the reforms proposed by the Secretary-General, to continue its efforts aimed at achieving overall gender equality, particularly at the Professional level and above, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 51/67 and 51/226. Her delegation welcomed the agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council, contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/52/281), concerning mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, and supported the recommendation of the Council in that respect.

27. Her Government was firmly convinced that there could be no lasting progress and development without progress in the situation of women, and it was determined to work towards a better future for Mozambican women.

28. **Ms. Narcisse** (Haiti) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community and by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

29. The situation of women in Haiti was very difficult; they were discriminated against in many areas, particularly education and health. Rural women, who were the most numerous (68 per cent), were even worse off, partly because 75 to 80 per cent of services were concentrated in urban areas, and partly because they were increasingly denied access to land, owing to inheritance and property distribution customs and the shortage of land, and were consequently forced to migrate to urban areas or to emigrate.

30. However, progress had been made in all areas since Haiti's accession, in 1981, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. For example, as of 1982, women had ceased to be considered minors from the standpoint of the law, they currently made up more than 25 per cent of senior civil servants, their participation in public affairs was increasing, and they held decision-making posts within the Government.

31. Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women had also led to improvements, since the national plan for the implementation of the outcome of the Conference mainly emphasized the eradication of poverty, legal reforms and efforts to improve awareness of women's issues. The Government had set up a commission to support the women of Artibonite, an area of the country where it had begun implementing agrarian reform, and had taken measures so that households headed by women could receive financial help in order to send their daughters to school. Haiti's accession to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (the Convention of Belém do Pará) should help improve the situation.

32. The poverty, unemployment and social tensions currently prevailing in Haiti, far from favouring the emancipation of women, were an obstacle to the strengthening of their capacities. Similarly, the persistence of stereotyped social behaviours was fuelling not only the discrimination to which women were traditionally subjected but also violence, which was becoming increasingly widespread; in general Haitian women did not report the ill treatment they endured because traditional socio-cultural values minimized its importance.

33. In order to remedy all those problems, women must participate more in economic, political and social life and exert a greater influence, and also, as a matter of priority, the laws must be reformed to protect their rights, ensure their access to health care and education, eradicate prostitution, especially among girls, and improve the situation of girls working as household employees.

34. **Mr. Linn Myaing** (Myanmar) said that, in Myanmar, women were traditionally in a favourable situation. Parents made no discrimination between boys and girls and the extended family, which was still predominant in society, accorded protection to women from childhood to adulthood, and even after marriage. Customary law and religious beliefs also protected the status of women since women were recognized as equal to men in matrimony, inheritance and property rights. The Constitution and the laws had always guaranteed all citizens equality before the law; the Penal Code included provisions to protect women, and there were laws to protect the rights of specific categories of women (women labourers and women under detention, for example).

35. The women of Myanmar, who had always taken part in public life, were continuing to play an important role in economic and social development. Fully recognizing their role and potential, his Government was committed to further enhancing their status. Thus, in 1990, it had promulgated a law establishing the Maternal and Child Welfare Association, which aimed not only to provide health care to women and children but also to enable women to engage in commercial activities by according them credit facilities. His Government was providing assistance to women's organizations such as the Women's Entrepreneurial Association, which was working to help women living in cities and rural areas to establish businesses and acquire vocational training. In the wake of the Fourth World Conference on Women, in 1996, it had also established a national mechanism for the advancement of women, in

which not only government officials, but also members of non-governmental organizations and individuals, were participating. Myanmar was working closely with United Nations agencies such as WHO to promote the advancement of women.

36. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for Palestine) said that Palestinian women were currently in a very difficult situation. The establishment of new Israeli colonial settlements, the confiscation of land and water resources and the closure of the occupied territory, including Jerusalem, had a detrimental effect on their living conditions and the general situation had deteriorated: there had been a rise in the number of refugees and displaced persons – causing the break-up of families – health conditions had deteriorated and unemployment had increased.

37. Palestinian women nevertheless continued to participate actively in the international community's efforts for the advancement of women. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, they had established a national strategy which took into account their own needs and the general situation of the Palestinian people and was based on the Palestine Liberation Organization's national programme and the 1988 Declaration of Independence. In order to ensure the application of that strategy, they sought support from the highest officials and the main institutions of the Palestinian Authority, thereby demonstrating their increasing awareness of the importance of their role and their desire for involvement. The first general democratic election organized in the Palestinian territory in January 1996 had confirmed that involvement since many women had participated and they had succeeded in winning 6 of the 88 seats in the Legislative Council and two ministerial posts.

38. Since the peace process had been seriously damaged by Israel in the occupied Palestine territory, including Jerusalem, the international community, and especially the United Nations, must increase their assistance to Palestinian women. Her delegation emphasized the importance of the integration of a gender perspective in all policies and programmes of United Nations bodies and expressed appreciation to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for its assistance to Palestinian women, especially in establishing their national committee, and to the European Union for its support and funding of those efforts.

39. **Mr. Tessema** (Ethiopia) said that his delegation thanked the Secretariat for the reports before the Committee, in particular the report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/52/326), and associated itself with the statement made by the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

40. Over 80 per cent of Ethiopian women lived in rural areas, where they were engaged in farming or lived as nomads. They worked very hard – an average of 13 to 17 hours a day – and thus contributed significantly to the nation at large. Even so, although the Constitution adopted by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1994 expressly guaranteed women's equality with men, women continued to suffer discrimination in all spheres. His Government had therefore formulated a national policy to assist women under which a women's affairs bureau had been established in the Prime Minister's office and women's affairs departments had been instituted in almost all government ministries and regional governments down to the district level.

41. Various measures had been taken to bring about a radical improvement in the situation of women. Through land redistribution, women's migration to urban areas had been curbed, and the age of inheritance had been raised, leading to a decline in early marriages. Specialized institutions had been established to provide credit and financial services to disadvantaged populations. A number of institutions of that type, such as those established by the women's affairs bureau in cooperation with donors like UNDP, UNICEF and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), were already in operation. He hoped that the decisions taken at the recent Microcredit Summit would provide concrete support to those endeavours.

42. The frequent violence against women was a source of serious concern. Female genital mutilation was widely practised in Ethiopia, the abduction of young women too poor to pay dowries was occurring more often and the rape of young girls on the way to and from school was not rare and had aggravated the reluctance of their parents to send them to school. The Government had begun country-wide research on violence against women, but it was already aware that information, education and communication were needed to remedy the situation. In that regard, his delegation thanked UNIFEM for having funded the project of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association to train women community leaders in rural areas to do legal work on behalf of women and children.

43. If his Government's policy to improve the status of women did not bear fruit, it would be because the regional administrations lacked the resources to implement it. Ethiopia appreciated the recent UNDP evaluation of the extent to which its fifth-cycle country programme had addressed women's problems. The sixth-cycle country programme, mindful of that evaluation, must ensure that

Ethiopia's offices for women's affairs were strengthened at all levels.

44. **Mr. Pashayev** (Azerbaijan) said, in the light of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/52/281), that despite the crucial role assumed by various United Nations agencies in the follow-up to the Conference and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into their policies and programmes, there were possibilities for further improvement in the areas of humanitarian assistance and post-conflict peace-building.

45. UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) could play a more active role in countries facing severe humanitarian crises as a consequence of military aggression and subsequent mass displacement of the civilian population. Such was the case in Azerbaijan which, as a result of Armenia's aggression, had 1 million refugees and displaced persons and had witnessed the living conditions of Azerbaijani women deteriorate markedly and the mortality rates for women and children rise. His Government therefore called on UNIFEM, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank to help it set up appropriate programmes.

46. His Government also attached great importance to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, which had adopted a resolution on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts, including those subsequently imprisoned (E/CN.6/1997/9). According to the State Commission of the Azerbaijan Republic on prisoners of war, hostages and missing persons, 316 women and 60 children were among the disappeared; it was known that some were being detained in prisons and correctional camps in Armenia and in the occupied Azerbaijani territories, to which international humanitarian organizations were denied access by Armenia. Azerbaijan believed that it was high time for the international community to take steps to deal with violations of international humanitarian law wherever they occurred.

47. Furthermore, his Government attached particular importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to the work of the corresponding Committee.

48. **Ms. Khuhro** (Pakistan) said that her Government, convinced that the empowerment of women, an essential part of its cultural ethos, was not merely a slogan but an economic and political necessity, was fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

49. The empowerment of women could not be seen in isolation from the larger issues of poverty and underdevelopment which were prevalent in developing countries, for statistics indicated that the burden of poverty fell heaviest on women. Unfortunately, the process of economic liberalization and globalization, coupled with structural adjustments that invariably resulted in a reduction of government funding, had hampered the developing countries' efforts to promote and protect women's rights.

50. Pakistan believed that the United Nations had to play a central role in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and that could be done only if the developed countries fulfil their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to official development assistance.

51. Violence against women remained a major constraint in the advancement of women and required the adoption of enabling legislation. Women were the main target of degrading brutality in many armed conflicts. Kashmiri women, for instance, had been subjected to sexual violence and humiliation as an integral part of the strategy of the Indian armed forces, as documented by international and Kashmiri human rights organizations and Indian non-governmental organizations. As a result, there had been a huge increase in stress-related diseases in young Kashmiri women. The international community must therefore bring pressure upon India to put an end to such atrocities and ensure impartial trials of those guilty of them.

52. Fully conscious of all that needed to be done, Pakistan had adopted a whole series of measures for the empowerment of women and their integration into the life of the country.

53. **Ms. Junod** (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) observed that while in theory women were no more vulnerable than men, in practice that was not the case. Already the frequent victims of discrimination in times of peace, women, together with children, were the chief victims of armed conflicts. Killed, wounded, raped, tortured, detained, displaced, refugeed and exiled, they faced unending violence. ICRC had never failed to denounce that state of affairs and to try to prevent such outrages, and it believed that the development of specific health care and psychological and social programmes for women had to be encouraged.

54. Humanitarian law had from the outset laid down the fundamental principle of equality between men and women, adding to it a non-discrimination clause, but had nevertheless recognized the need to establish special protections for persons of the female sex, enabling them to preserve their dignity and integrity and protecting their role as mothers. Rape and sexual violence were unacceptable and constituted a war crime as well as a crime against humanity, and had been strongly condemned by the twenty-sixth International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

55. To act without any discrimination to prevent and alleviate the sufferings of victims of conflicts was the *raison d'être* of ICRC. Non-discrimination did not mean the absence of any distinction based on sex, and therefore ICRC helped imprisoned, interned or displaced women, taking their gender into account. It also tried to ensure that differing treatment would not work to the disadvantage of women.

56. Since women were inseparable from the family, ICRC intervened to preserve family unity in times of conflict. By facilitating the exchange of messages, the arrangement of visits and the reunification of family members, it helped make the suffering more bearable and prevent the disintegration of the social fabric.

57. ICRC was not, however, satisfied with simply acting to protect and assist. It had also devised social and economic reintegration programmes intended for women who had been victims of conflict. Thanks to vocational training, such women could take on the role of family breadwinners. They could, moreover, when their spouse had disappeared or died, receive psychological and social assistance and financial support and sometimes eventually participate directly in carrying out programmes.

58. Women often played an essential role in maintaining, establishing and consolidating peace. Being close to the realities on the ground and sensitive and attentive to social problems, they exercised a moderating influence. Also, in the ICRC delegations, they were exercising responsibility in increasing numbers, sometimes paying with their lives for their commitment.

59. Legal norms existed to reinforce the protection that women must have; it was absolutely necessary to apply them.

60. **Ms. Miller** (Malta) said that her delegation welcomed efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into all United Nations programmes and policies and to improve the situation of women in the Secretariat, while recognizing that much remained to be done to achieve gender balance in management and enable more women to be appointed to high-level posts.

61. The advancement of women was an increasingly important issue at both the national and the international level; women's issues were no longer viewed in isolation but in an integrated fashion. The formulation of national policies on women and their incorporation into national development plans, full access by women to the management of economic resources and partnership with men were essential to sustainable development. Equality of men and women should be supported by legislation, but in itself legislation was not enough; it was also essential to change attitudes and inculcate a culture of gender equality. Education had a crucial role to play.

62. Over the past two decades, her country had enacted many laws and had taken a number of initiatives to redress gender discrimination and enable women to enjoy fully their social, economic and political rights and rise to positions of responsibility. Her Government had mainly concentrated its efforts on women's participation in decision-making and safeguarding their rights at the workplace and in their private and family life. A committee had recently been set up to ensure respect for women's rights as citizens, consumers and employees; there were also plans to issue a white paper on sexual discrimination with the cooperation of a UNDP legal expert. Her country was also taking specific measures to advance women.

63. Equality was inextricably linked to human rights, and it was important to ensure that physical, sexual and psychological violence against women were also dealt with. No effort should be spared to improve the status of women around the world, thereby allowing them to fully enjoy their rights. Her delegation welcomed the fact that UNIFEM had focused its human rights programme on mainstreaming the human rights of women, eliminating violence against women and strengthening women's awareness of their human rights, and that it had established a Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women. Her country was pleased to be able to contribute to the Fund and to take part in the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which would address women's rights and violence against women.

64. The development of a society based on a partnership between men and women, equal in dignity, should be the ultimate goal. Her Government remained committed to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and looked forward to reviewing in the year 2000 the progress that had been made in implementing it. Ensuring respect for women's right to equality, development and peace was a reaffirmation

of the importance of human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women. In order to achieve that goal, it was appropriate to take initiatives at the national level and establish international cooperation.

65. **Ms. Vadiati** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had provided the international community with an opportunity to develop new approaches and strategies for promoting the status of women while examining existing obstacles and addressing challenges. It was now appropriate to assess the follow-up to the outcome of the Conference. In that regard, the Report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/281 was useful because, *inter alia*, it gave an account of the activities undertaken within the United Nations system. Governments should also promote the rights and role of women and end their marginalization with the help of the international community. However, countries which had been subjected to unilateral coercive measures did not possess the means to implement the Beijing Platform for Action fully.

66. Nevertheless, in recent years her Government had improved the status of women in areas such as education, the economy and decision-making. Women had also been able to participate to a greater extent in the cultural and social life of the country. Following the recent presidential election, that trend was expected to grow stronger in the Government, non-governmental organizations and civil society. In addition, the President had recently appointed a senior adviser for women's affairs and had also appointed women to the posts of Vice-President and head of the organization dealing with environmental issues.

67. Aware of the fact that the country's development could be furthered by protecting and respecting the rights of all citizens, including women, in all areas, her Government had raised public awareness of women's rights by organizing seminars and workshops; it had also developed mechanisms for the advancement of women and incorporated a gender perspective into legislation, programmes and policies and the national plan of action for women.

68. Women and children were the most vulnerable section of society in armed conflicts. The situation in Afghanistan was particularly alarming, and the international community should take urgent measures to alleviate the suffering of the population. The international community should vigorously oppose the equally reprehensible policies being pursued by Israel in the occupied territories.

69. It was important to improve the international climate in order to enable countries to promote the rights of women and implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

70. **Ms. Ray** (India), associating her delegation with the statement made by the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77, said that her country fully supported all initiatives to mainstream the gender perspective in policies and programmes at the national level and in the United Nations system as a whole. Women, who constituted half of humanity, could no longer be considered as a "special interest group" and gender problems should no longer be dealt with separately. All the Main Committees of the General Assembly, not just the Third Committee, should be aware of the impact of policy decisions on men and women and of their contribution to the goal of gender equality. The integration of women was now the business of governments in the broad sense and not of special institutions.

71. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on effective mobilization and integration of women in development (A/52/345), which examined women's issues and equality of the sexes from the point of view of economic and fiscal policies and trade liberalization. The concept of gender mainstreaming offered a new way of looking at the globalization of the economy and at policies which placed greater importance on markets than on human beings, particularly poor and vulnerable women.

72. India had adopted the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (which would soon be presented to the Secretariat), incorporating the gender perspective in all its plans, programmes, policies, evaluations and budgetary allocations.

73. Indian women were increasingly active in political life. A third of the seats in urban and rural local bodies were reserved for them and there was a proposal to extend that policy to the state legislatures and national parliament. Thirty per cent of all development resources were allocated to women. Lastly, a parliamentary committee had been established to monitor the implementation of all programmes for the advancement of women.

74. The promotion and welfare of the girl child was the object of particular attention. Her Government was endeavouring to introduce universal primary education, focusing on the survival, protection and development of the girl child. In October 1997, the Prime Minister had launched a financial grant scheme, which, although admittedly very modest, nonetheless demonstrated that her country saw the advancement of women as beginning with the girl child.

75. **Mr. Sergiwa** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that, despite all the decisions taken by the General Assembly and by various women's conferences, women continued to be the victims of discrimination, violence and exploitation in many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, where poverty, unemployment and declining health and social services only worsened their predicament. Not only were women's fundamental rights and freedoms violated, but, in such circumstances, women became peripheral to the development process. The international community should endeavour to remedy that situation by seeking to create social and economic conditions favourable to women's integration, while taking account of the moral and religious values of each society.

76. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action should begin with the family, society's basic unit, which needed to teach children moral values and the importance of gender equality.

77. In order to implement the Beijing Platform for Action effectively and irrespective of their political and economic persuasion, States should cooperate in taking practical action to help women, particularly refugees, older persons, the disabled, and women living in poverty and under foreign occupation. They should create a favourable political climate to that end, based on mutual respect, non-interference in domestic affairs and the rejection of hegemony and the use of force.

78. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had adopted numerous laws and other legislative measures to guarantee women full economic, social and political rights. It had set up a national multisectoral committee to ensure follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action recommendations. A paper on the rights of women in Libyan society, published in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in 1997, had established a number of rights and principles, including equal rights, the right of self-determination and, to that end, the right to enjoy financial independence. Women must also have the right to terminate their marriage and obtain custody of their children. Despite everything that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had done for the advancement of women, including its rapid accession to various human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the sanctions unfairly imposed on it by the Security Council had posed numerous problems, preventing the implementation of some provisions of international conventions, such as those concerning the right to life, food, medicines and freedom of movement. Many insistent voices had called for the lifting of the sanctions, whose principal victims were women and children. The United Nations should appoint, forthwith, a special rapporteur to examine the particular effects of sanctions and coercive measures with repercussions for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

79. **Mr. Abba Kourou** (Niger) said that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had drawn on many United Nations conferences, which had all recognized the importance of women in sustainable development and protection of the environment, and had all stressed women's fundamental rights.

80. Two years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, his country's Ministry for Social Welfare, Population and the Promotion of Women and Protection of Children had established a committee to implement the Beijing recommendations, by identifying strategies and priority objectives and mobilizing the resources required. The unit responsible for monitoring the education of girls, set up in October 1996, was working to raise girls' enrolment rates from 36 to 40 per cent by the year 2000. His Government had also drawn up a national policy paper on the advancement of women, adopted in September 1996, and had established a five-year plan of action for the implementation of the Beijing recommendations. Moreover, 28 associations and non-governmental organizations and more than 1,000 groups had helped to improve women's living and working conditions, building up women's groups, developing women's managerial skills and ensuring their financial independence. A revolving credit scheme had enhanced women's income-generating activities and a preliminary draft had been drawn up for a support fund project aimed at improving women's access to credit facilities. In June 1996, the Government had adopted a programme of action and investment priorities, in which women's projects were well represented.

81. An evaluation of those projects and programmes had provided evidence of improvements in living standards and greater awareness of women's issues.

82. His country wished to express its gratitude to its bilateral and multilateral partners, including the European Union, Switzerland, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Ministry for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, Denmark, UNDP, USAID and UNICEF.

83. His Government had put the final touches to a framework poverty eradication programme, which would be presented to a round table of donors in Geneva in the second half of January 1998.

84. It was also preparing to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

and carrying out an awareness campaign concerning violence against women and girls.

85. **Ms. Nyinaw Uwami** (Rwanda) said that Rwandan women had organized the first Pan-African Conference on Gender, Peace and Development, from 1 to 3 December 1996, and that the members of the Committee would be informed of its Platform for Action and resolutions. Her delegation thanked all those who had supported and participated in the initiative, which had been in follow-up to the Beijing Conference. The Pan-African Conference had been an opportunity for an exchange of views between women from all over the world, who had learned about the work of the women of Rwanda in the reconstruction of the country. The latter had helped to set up government structures, such as the Ministry for Gender, Family and Social Affairs, to establish local women's committees, to persuade the Government to appoint one representative on gender issues to each ministry and to organize solidarity camps to teach young people the culture of peace; women had also participated in the repatriation of refugees, particularly in November and December 1996, when over 2 million refugees living in Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire had returned to Rwanda, where they were now fully integrated.

86. The women of Rwanda, who as a result of the genocide now represented some 70 per cent of the country's population, demanded that all those responsible for the genocide and those who had committed other crimes against humanity should be brought to justice; they sought the support of all countries to that end. Rwanda was awaiting a visit by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights. The women of Rwanda and all women who had survived genocide in other parts of the world deserved special support. Her country had set up a fund for them and asked all countries to contribute to it. Moreover, it had begun a process of legal reform to allow women to take on new responsibilities. The women of Rwanda also demanded that pressure be brought to bear on Governments to implement the affirmative action policies which had been approved at the Beijing Conference, but had never been fully implemented, as witnessed by the fact that too few women held decision-making positions and not all women had access to education. The policies in question would allow women to play a full part in education for peace and the re-establishment of peace.

87. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) said that at the political level her country attached great importance to the advancement of women, and had set a series of objectives in that area which it had incorporated into its development programmes. Thus, in the third five-year plan, a sum of $1.2 million had been allocated to services specifically for women and children, while in the fourth five-year plan (1997-2002) numerous activities of benefit to women were envisaged. In addition, since her country was convinced that women's problems were of concern to the whole of society, it was also seeking, through the Social Fund, which had been established to create both temporary and permanent jobs and to provide employment opportunities for women, to improve the quality of social services for the entire population.

88. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/52/326), her delegation noted that, while in resolution 50/165 the General Assembly had requested the international community and United Nations organizations and bodies to promote the realization of programmes and projects aimed at the improvement of the situation of rural women, the report, when discussing the factors which influenced the situation of rural women, referred only to policies adopted by Governments in order to increase resources, without making the point that the level of resources was directly linked to the international economic and trade situation, investment volume and the financing of development programmes carried out within the framework of technical cooperation, all of which were factors that helped developing countries to expand their exports and increase their income, thus enabling them to provide greater assistance to rural women. Her delegation noted in that connection that the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the International Training and Research Institute for Women (INSTRAW) (A/52/352) referred only to training seminars for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, without mentioning a single training programme for developing countries. INSTRAW activities had been confined to the publication of research, analyses and documentation. As to the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/52/408), her delegation wished to emphasize that, while it was desirable that by the year 2000 50 per cent of Secretariat staff should be women, due consideration must be given to the principle of equitable geographical distribution when posts were allocated. The outlook was much improved given that, according to the report, some 4,500 employees were due to retire over the next 10 years, which should allow the 50/50 goal to be achieved. That objective should not be pursued, however, at the expense of the goals of social and economic development which must be attained in conformity with the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the various United Nations conferences. With regard to the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, her delegation noted

with regret that the Secretary-General's report dwelt on the problems posed by the need to achieve a gender balance where Secretariat staff were concerned, without according sufficient attention to the progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, or to the obstacles which had to be overcome. In particular, the report did not clarify adequately how the United Nations system and the donor community had discharged their obligation to provide technical and other assistance to the developing countries, particularly the African and least developed countries. The Beijing Platform for Action called on the developed countries to do everything within their power to set aside 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance and financing the operational activities of the United Nations.

89. Egypt fulfilled all its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, particularly its financial obligations, paying its assessed contributions without any conditions or restrictions, on time and in full. It would endeavour to respect all the priorities set by the United Nations in its medium-term plan, which identified economic development as the core of the Organization's work and activities. It was of the utmost importance that the Beijing Platform for Action should not be reduced to an exercise aimed solely at achieving a gender balance in the United Nations Secretariat, and that that exercise should not absorb the Organization's meagre resources, to the detriment of other activities approved by Member States under the regular budget. The problem had been raised in a number of press releases issued by United Nations bodies and specialized agencies responsible for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, most recently in a World Health Organization press release issued on 22 October 1997.

90. **Ms. Aghadjanian** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that she wished to make some clarifications with regard to the statement by the representative of Azerbaijan. To say that the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh was a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and to speak of a so-called act of aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan was misleading. The conflict was in fact between the people of Nagorny Karabakh, who were fighting for self-determination, and the Azerbaijani Government, which refused to recognize that right. Since the start of the conflict, Armenia had consistently advocated a peaceful solution on the basis of a negotiated settlement.

91. With regard to the question of hostages and prisoners, her delegation recalled that on 26 March 1997, in response to an appeal by the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and as a goodwill gesture, Armenia had released all the Azerbaijani prisoners referred to in the list compiled by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and it had pronounced itself in favour, on that occasion, of the total and unconditional release of all prisoners. Armenia had requested Azerbaijan to respond in kind to the Minsk Group's initiative by releasing all the prisoners of war it held. However, prisoners, including women, remained in various parts of Azerbaijan.

92. Her delegation wished to reiterate that the Third Committee was not an appropriate forum for discussion of matters relating to Nagorny Karabakh, which were considered within the context of the Minsk Conference of the OSCE.

93. **Mr. Amirbekov** (Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he fully endorsed the statement made by his country's representative. He had nothing to add since the facts spoke for themselves. There was, however, a need to underline the fact that, while Armenia claimed not to be a participant in the conflict, it had been the only country to state that it still did not recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, a position which it had clearly indicated at the OSCE Lisbon Summit.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.